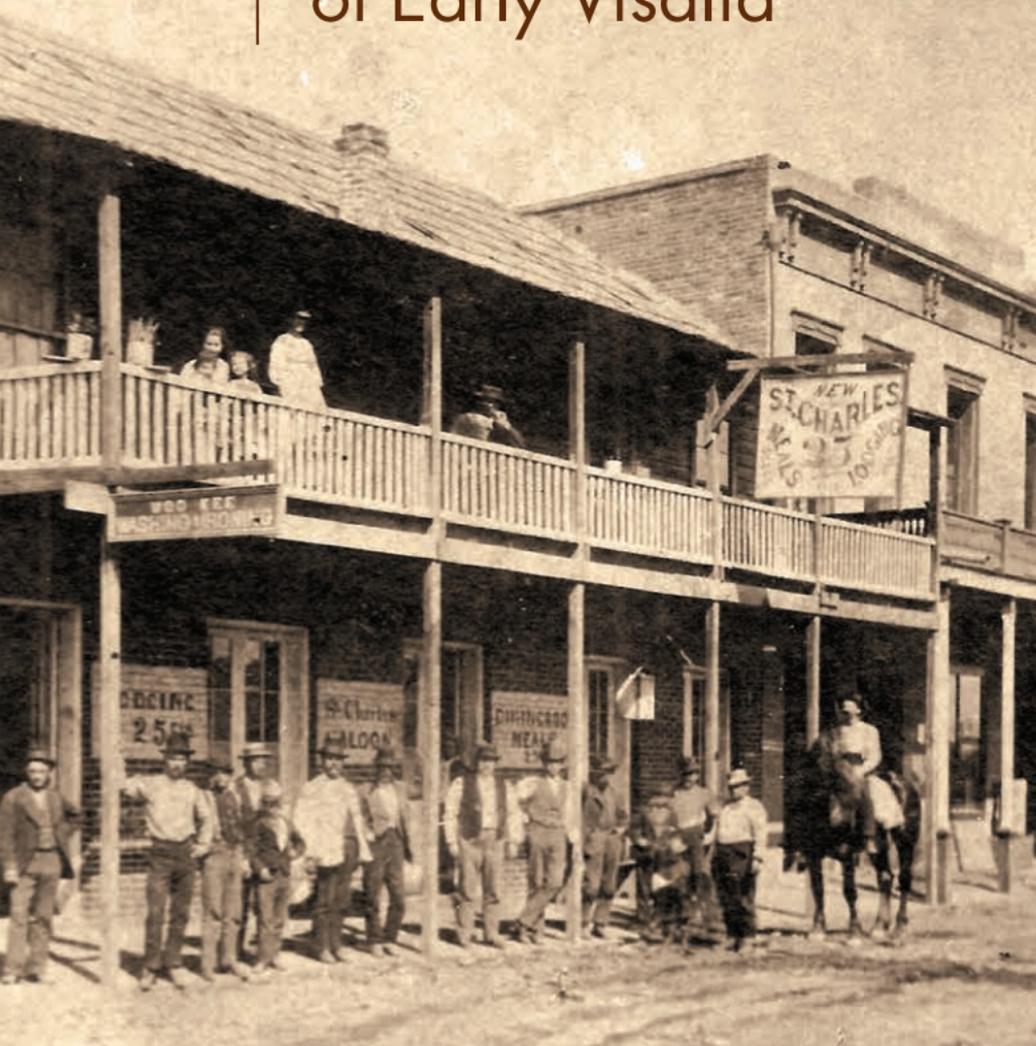


Visalia

Then & Now

A Self-guided Tour
of Early Visalia



Sponsored by:
Kaweah Collectors,
Visalia's chapter of
Questers International,
and by Visit Visalia.



Special thanks to Terry Ommen for photos, information and insights.

How Visalia Got Its Name.

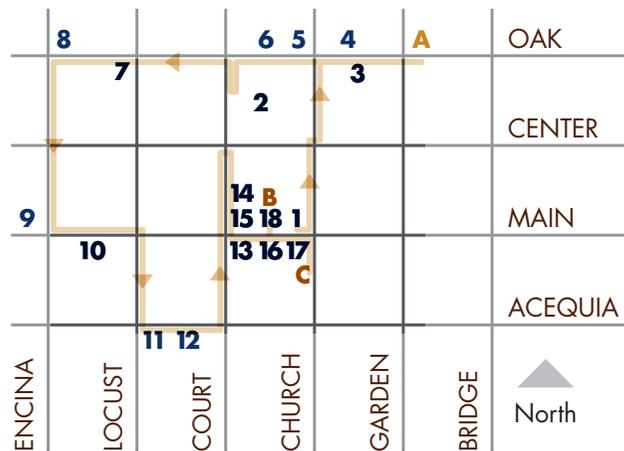
It was 1852 when an eccentric by the name of Nathaniel Vise opened a San Francisco restaurant with bear meat on the menu. Why “Nat Vise, alias The Bear Hunter,” chose to make his way to the Four Creeks area is unknown, but on July 10 of that same year he voted in the election that granted Tulare County its charter. A few months later, on November 1, Mr. Vise and a Mr. O’Neal declared that they had “located and surveyed a new town called Visalia, in the finest part of the Four Creeks.” Vise originally came from Visalia, Kentucky, also named for his family.

A restless man, the bear hunter did not remain in Visalia for long. After a stint as a land promoter in Tulare County, the preacher/hunter/horse trader moved to Southern California to work for a fur company, a job that required a fair amount of travel to the eastern states.

In 1882, during a stay in Texarkana, Arkansas, the town was hit by a tornado and the building in which Vise took refuge collapsed, killing those inside.

Note: According to Wikipedia: Visalia, Kentucky was a city in Kenton County, Kentucky, United States. The population was 111 at the 2000 census. The city government was dissolved in November 2006.

Historic Visalia Trail (Approx. 45 minute walk)



1 BANK OF ITALY

128 E. Main St • Northwest corner at Church St.

In 1921, the Bank of Italy bought and combined the Bank of Visalia and the Visalia Savings Bank and Trust Company. Construction on their new branch began on this site in 1922. At five stories, this Classic Revival towered above Main Street. Construction took six months and cost \$375,000. The exterior remains unchanged, and the interior has retained much of its original charm, with tall windows, marble floors and columns, and the original mail chute.

Now: The ground floor is still occupied by a bank, with the remaining floors leased to businesses. Note the plaque on the exterior placed by the Questers.



2 COURTHOUSE SQUARE

210 N. Court St. • Northeast corner at Center Ave.

This site was developed in 1857 as the location for a county courthouse, but it wasn't until 1876 that the large structure was built to meet the needs of a growing population. The granite edging around the property, quarried from nearby Rocky Hill, was added in the 1890s. An Art Deco-style annex was added in 1935. In 1952 the original 1876 structure had to be torn down due to earthquake damage.

Now: After decades of sitting empty, the Art Deco annex is being restored as a boutique hotel.



3 SOUTHERN PACIFIC DEPOT

207 E. Oak St. • Southeast corner at Church St.

In 1916, this Mission Revival style structure was built as Visalia's Southern Pacific train depot. The same year it was built, this became the setting for a dramatic send-off of nearly 100 soldiers of Visalia's Company D Infantry Regiment of the National Guard to Nogales, New Mexico. Shown in the background is the county courthouse.

Now: The depot was remodeled in 1971 as a restaurant. The lanterns flanking the entrance are original, and a shining locomotive light from Engine 612 welcomes patrons to the 612 Room bar. Historical photos and items are on display.



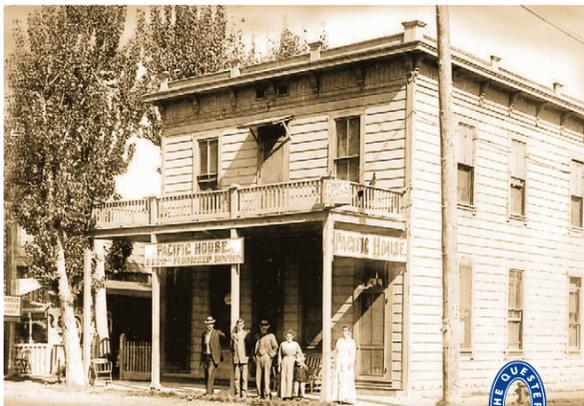
The 1890 jail faced Church St. The jail built in 1918 faces Oak Ave.

4 TULARE COUNTY JAIL

204 E. Oak Ave. • Northeast corner at Church St.

This Renaissance Revival building was constructed in 1918 at a cost of \$50,000 to replace the previous county jail built in 1890. The older jail's exterior was described as “happy and pleasing,” but the structure itself was not very secure. In 1891, notorious train robber Gratton Dalton used a knife and file to cut the bars, allowing him and two others to escape.

Now: The existing structure served as a jail until 1962, when the jail was moved near the current county courthouse. The first and second floors serve as office space, with a speak-easy style restaurant in the basement.



5 PACIFIC HOUSE

120 E. Oak St. • Northwest corner at Church St.

This Italianate-style lodging house was built in about 1886 in this quiet section of the city. Quiet — until the jail and train depot were built. Stories of prisoners yelling and banging on the metal bars are well-documented.

Now: It serves as an office building.

NOTE: If you're up for it, walk a few blocks east to visit the site of Fort Visalia. (Item A on the map and back panel)



6 ADOBE HOUSE

112 E. Oak St. • Between Court St. and Church St.

Built in 1927, this adobe building was the home of the Tulare County Farm Bureau. Prior to that, the bureau met at the Visalia Municipal Auditorium.

Now: At its current location at 737 N. Ben Maddox Way, the bureau pays homage to this building with a mural on the exterior of its office building.



7 FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

215 N. Locust St. • Southwest corner at Oak St.

The Presbyterians were present in Visalia as early as 1866, but had not established an ongoing presence until 1878 with a following of about 60 people. The above photo shows a previous structure on the current property but facing Locust Street. It was replaced with the current sanctuary in 1958.

Now: The Victorian Shaw house just south of the main structure (shown on the left) was moved in the 1980s to make room for the church's day care, and the restaurant-bar on the northwest corner of Court Street and Center Avenue was purchased and converted to Cafe 210, also operated by the church. The cafe doubles as a venue for civic presentations.



8 VISALIA LIBRARY/ LITTLE WHITE SCHOOL

200 W. Oak St. • Northeast corner at Encina St.

This site has served as a school and/or library since May of 1857, starting with Visalia's first school, known as Little White School. Two more school buildings followed (one is pictured above). Over the years, the mature trees provided shade for community gatherings.

Now: The old City Library, built in 1936 and used for storage since 1976, was converted into a children's wing in October 2008. The newer portion of the complex was built in 1976 as the Joint Tulare County/Visalia City Library.



9 VISALIA FOX THEATRE

308 W. Main St. • Northwest corner at Encina St.

The William Fox Company-Fox West Coast Theaters began construction on this beautiful structure in April 1929, and it opened to audiences in 1930. Built in the glamorous age of motion pictures, the 6-foot neon-lit clocks on its tower and its bulb-lit marquees beckoned movie-goers to upcoming feature films. The theater has a Spanish-style exterior and an East Indian interior featuring a large carved head of a genie over the main stage, elephants, pagodas, stars that light up in the ceiling, and a pipe organ. Its exterior tower has become a symbol of Visalia's downtown.

Now: The meticulously restored theater is home to the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra and hosts A-list entertainers.

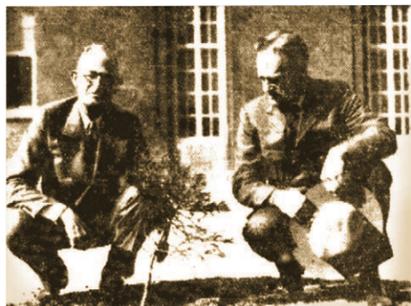


10 MT. WHITNEY POWER AND ELECTRIC COMPANY

217 W. Main St. • Across from and east of the Fox Theatre

Local newspaperman, businessman, and visionary Ben Maddox teamed up with like-minded experts and investors to start the Mt. Whitney Power and Electric Company. The fledgling enterprise incorporated in 1899, and work soon commenced on a generating plant, flumes and electrical lines. In 1912, the company built its own offices on Main Street for \$30,000, and remained at this location even after becoming Southern California Edison. By 1955 it had outgrown its space and moved to new offices down the street.

Now: The building houses mixed retail.



This 1936 newspaper photo shows the newly planted tree with Visalia postmaster Nathan Levy on the left and park superintendent Guy Hopping on the right.

11 SEQUOIA LEGACY TREE

111 W. Acequia Ave. • Southeast corner at Court St.

Planted in 1936 as a 3-year-old sapling, this Giant sequoia was transplanted from Grant Grove by Guy Hopping, superintendent of General Grant National Park (now Kings Canyon). Hopping occupied an office in the basement of the post office during winter months.

Now: Learn about Visalia's connection to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks at the on-site displays.



12 VISALIA POST OFFICE

111 W. Acequia Ave. • Between Court St. and Locust St.

Construction on this WPA-era (Works Progress Administration) project went fast, beginning in 1933 and finishing in April 1934. Note the geometric elements and nature motifs throughout: eagle, plant, flower, and sunrise, as well as the unique brick work, friezes above the main doors and windows, and the bronze scallop shell light fixtures flanking the entrance. The terrazzo flooring, marble paneling, service windows and radiator grills are all original.

Now: This Art Deco-style building still serves as Visalia's downtown post office.

Shown on the east-facing marquee:

"Snow White and the Three Stooges"

ALSO Dawn Addams in "Rommel's Treasure"

Rommel's Treasure was released in 1955.

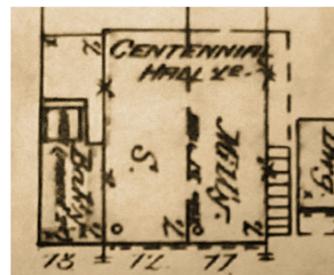


13 HARRELL BUILDING

101 E. Main St. • Southeast corner at Court St.

Originally built with three stories, this was Visalia's first "skyscraper." Built primarily as a bank with offices upstairs, it housed the depot for the Visalia & Tulare Railroad (VTRR) until 1900. Unfortunately, a 1962 fire destroyed the top floor, and water damage rendered the second floor unsalvageable.

Now: The ground floor is still a bank, and Jasper Harrell's original vault is still inside. Note the mural painted on the west side along Court Street, titled "Hermit's Cabin".



14 CENTENNIAL HALL

129 N. Court St. • Mid-block on the west side of the street.

Erected in 1876 by Elias Jacob, this was Visalia's first structure built specifically as an entertainment venue. Notable entertainers included Charles Stratton, a dwarf, better known to the world as General Tom Thumb, and his wife, pictured above. Stratton was discovered and made world-famous by circus pioneer P.T. Barnum. The theater was upstairs with retail on the ground floor.

Now: A recent renovation revealed the date it was built, 1876, cast in the top of the facade. The building houses retail.



15 PALACE HOTEL

104 E. Main St. • Northeast corner at Court St.

Built in 1876, the Palace Hotel was declared the "finest hotel outside San Francisco." It was here that Stephen Mather met up with 15 influential men to embark on a two-week venture as the Mather Mountain Party. The group trekked through Sequoia National Park and summited Mt. Whitney, making note of the lack of oversight and declining conditions in the park. This venture was a pivotal step in passing the legislation that created the National Park Service. Mather was named as its first superintendent. The hotel occupied the second floor, with retail space on the street level. The main entrance was on the west facade, facing Court Street.

Now: The bottom floors are still used for retail. The second floor has been unoccupied for decades.



16 S. SWEET & CO.

115 E. Main St. • Between Court St. and Church St.

Sweet's Department Store began in 1857 and moved two years later to this location. The building was later divided into three businesses. One of them, Link's Clothing Store, was operated by brothers Bob and Tom Link until 2013. The brothers had taken over from their dad, who opened Link's in 1941, just days before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Now: The building houses various businesses and an upstairs that was recently developed as apartments.

From about 1889 to 1900, the Harrell Building housed the depot for the Visalia & Tulare Railroad. One of its trains is shown here, departing south on Court Street for Tulare.





17 ELIAS JACOB BUILDING

129 E. Main St. • Southwest corner at Church St.

The Elias Jacob Building was built in 1894. Jacob was a local businessman who also built the Centennial Building. He had previously built a structure on this site. It burned in January 1894 but was quickly rebuilt. Arthur Saunders of Visalia was the architect and C.S. Hogan of Los Angeles was the contractor. Granite trim on the building was quarried from Rocky Hill.

Now: During his tenure as building owner and tenant, former Visalia Mayor Bonnel Pryor had portions of the plaster on the facade removed in the 1990s, revealing many of the brick and granite features of the original construction.



18 CROSS BUILDING

116 E. Main St. • Mid-block on the north side of Main St.

In 1906, O.R. Cross purchased the lot where the building now stands. In about 1908, the building you see now was built and became Cross Hardware Co. In subsequent years, the business operated as the Cross-Horlock Hardware Store, then later as Togni Branch Stationery.

Now: The building serves as retail and commercial office space.

Other Points of Interest:

A FORT VISALIA

300 E. Oak Ave. • Northeast corner at Garden St.

In 1852, the first settlers to Visalia built a split-oak stave fort on this site. A bridge leading to the fort over Mill Creek became the namesake for what is now Bridge Street. The fort was built in response to the Woodsville massacre of 1851, in which 15 to 17 men (accounts differ) were slain just a few miles to the east by Kaweah Indians.

Now: A plan is in place to create a low-income housing project that incorporates gallery, studio and living space.

B BUTTERFIELD STATION

E. Main St. • North side of street between Court St. and Church St.



Near midnight on October 8, 1858, a Butterfield Overland Mail Company stagecoach arrived in Visalia, en route from St. Louis to San Francisco. On board to record the journey was New York Herald reporter, Waterman L. Ormsby, on his way to becoming the first passenger to make the trip in less than 50 days. Impressed with Visalia's enthusiasm and hospitality, Ormsby immortalized the overnight stop in his writings.

Now: Near the site of the coach's arrival is a granite monument and brass plaque commemorating the event.

C HORSE RINGS IN GRANITE CURBS

Along and near Main Street are metal rings anchored into granite curbs quarried and fashioned over 100 years ago by Rocky Hill Granite Co. Visitors to Visalia's downtown hitched their horses to these rings.



Now: When sidewalks and curbs were being replaced in the 1960s, city engineer George Weddle insisted the granite curbs and rings remain as a nod to our rural heritage.

Other sites: Enjoy a walk around the picturesque Victorian era neighborhood just north and west of Oak and Encina streets. Visalia Cemetery, just north of Giddings and Murray, also offers glimpses of our town's fascinating past.

Kaweah Collectors is the Visalia Chapter of Questers International. The organization supports the preservation and restoration of historic buildings, sites and antiquities. Sites noted with The Questers logo have been researched and marked with plaques by this volunteer organization.